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AUTHOR Addison-Jacobson, Jill; Addison, Joy
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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the implications of an effort to promote service learning in two middle schools in the Palo Alto (California) Unified School District. The schools are grades six through eight with about 1,000 students in each. The paper describes seven service efforts and then analyzes the costs and benefits of these projects. The study concludes with some reflections on why service learning is a difficult reform to implement, makes recommendations for practitioners, and suggests considerations for policy makers who are considering implementing service learning in their communities. (EH)

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Service Learning in Middle School: The Day from Hell?

Using the experience of two middle schools this paper explores some of the implications of an effort to promote service learning. It describes seven service efforts and then analyzes the costs and benefits of these projects. The paper concludes with some reflections on why service learning is a difficult reform to implement, recommendations for practitioners, and considerations for policy makers.

Jill Addison-Jacobson
Program Director
Service Learning 2000 Center
50 Embarcadero Road
Palo Alto, CA 94301

Joy Addison
Principal
Jane Lathrop Stanford Middle School
480 East Meadow
Palo Alto, CA 94306

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The Day From Hell

It is 7:15 A.M. on a Friday morning in November. The phone in the main office at Jordan Middle School rings. It is the Santa Clara Valley Water District. Students from Jordan are going to clean up the Matadero Creek as part of their community service effort today. The Water District is calling to let someone know where to pick up the key. The key is at Central Office in south San Jose -- approximately forty-five minutes from Jordan in no traffic and close to ninety minutes away at this time of the day. The students are scheduled to leave at 8:30 A.M. Welcome to community service learning: a day from hell. "Highlights" from the remainder of the day include:

The now "creekless" creek clean-up group heads to the Baylands -- a salt-water preserve close to school -- to help pick up trash there. The group very disappointed that their task has been changed is bribed by the adult sponsor: any pair the fill a green garbage bag with trash will get a Slurpee on the way home. Thirty minutes later one pair of students reports that another pair has filled their garbage bag by dumping the contents of a park trash container into their garbage bag.

A group of six students, escorted by a parent volunteer, arrive at Washington Elementary School to serve as aides in the fifth grade class -- a placement that was confirmed by phone the day before -- only to be told that all the fifth grade students are on a field trip.

A volunteer from the Chamber of Commerce offers to supervise students who arrive back from their sites early. She greets returning students in the cafeteria and asks them create a drawing for a scrapbook that will capture their experience during the day. Most of the 150 students were expected back at 1:30. She arrives at 12:30 expecting to meet with less than 20 students. Close to 75 students fill the cafeteria by 1:00 p.m. They complete their drawing instantaneously and then run around until the program begins again at 1:30.

This was the first large-scale service experience planned for middle school students in the Palo Alto Unified School District. It was not intended to be integrally linked to any curriculum, but the coordinators did hope it would increase student awareness of others in the community and induce students to continue to serve on their own. Weeks of planning went into getting enough service sites, coordinating parent drivers, preparing students to serve, letting students choose their sites, and thinking about reflection and evaluation activities. By the end of the day everyone was exhausted and no one know could tell if the day was valuable for anyone. Thus, the day from hell. However, this effort bred many more, better planned, more integrated, more meaningful to students and more useful to community. This paper explores those experiences.

Introduction

This paper explores both the benefits and difficulties of service learning as a strategy for school reform in middle school using seven examples from two middle schools as the basis for the study. The paper begins by describing the seven project efforts and then examines the costs and benefits inherent to them. Extrapolating from these projects, the paper then focuses on some of the reasons service learning is difficult reform to implement. The paper concludes with recommendations for other practitioners and policy makers that we think will help improve the potential of service learning as a strategy for educational reform.

Context

The two middle schools observed for this paper are both in the Palo Alto Unified School District in Palo Alto, California. These schools are sixth through eighth grade sites for approximately 1000 students each. The district enrolls 8,551 students including over five hundred who have transferred from other school districts. The racial make-up of the district is as follows: 5.2% Afro-American, 6.2% Hispanic, 15.9% Asian, and 71.3% Caucasian. Approximately ten percent of the districts' students are classified as special education students.

Since 1990, the district has promoted student service to the community through its support of Youth Community Service (YCS). YCS is a collaborative partnership among Palo Alto Unified; its neighboring elementary school district, the Ravenswood City School District; the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University; the City of Palo Alto; and the Mid-Peninsula YWCA. YCS sponsors after-school service clubs at all middle and high schools in both districts, coordinates large group service days for students in both communities and offers a summer leadership development program. In 1992, YCS received a grant from the California Department of Education CalServe Division to support service learning in five middle schools in the two districts. Many of the projects described here are the direct result of the CalServe initiative.

CalServe funding was made available as the result of federal legislation called the National and Community Service Act of 1989. This bill provided funds for service learning on a formula basis to state educational agencies, and on a competitive basis to institutions of higher education. Stanford University, in collaboration with four local school districts including Palo Alto Unified, received one the higher education grants. The Stanford grant, called Service Learning 2000, provided funds for a two-week summer institute for teachers and student teachers to come together to develop service learning curriculum.

This paper is based upon the experience of authors with both the YCS and Service Learning 2000 projects and their effects on Palo Alto Unified middle schools since 1991. Joy Addison was the Co-Principal of Jordan Middle School from 1991 to 1993. At Jordan she conceived and help implement both the sixth and seventh grade projects described within. In 1993 she came to Jane Lathrop Stanford Middle School as Principal. She worked with teachers there to implement the seventh

grade service learning experience, conceptualized the sixth grade experience and taught the community service class for its first two semesters. Jill Addison-Jacobson was director of YCS from 1991-1994 . She helped secure the CalServe grant and worked with all five middle schools as they begun plans for implementation. Currently, she teaches the community service class as JLS. Addison-Jacobson co-led the first two Service Learning 2000 summer institutes, and in 1994 she joined Service Learning 2000 full-time and now works throughout California supporting teachers who are working to implement service learning.

What is Service Learning?

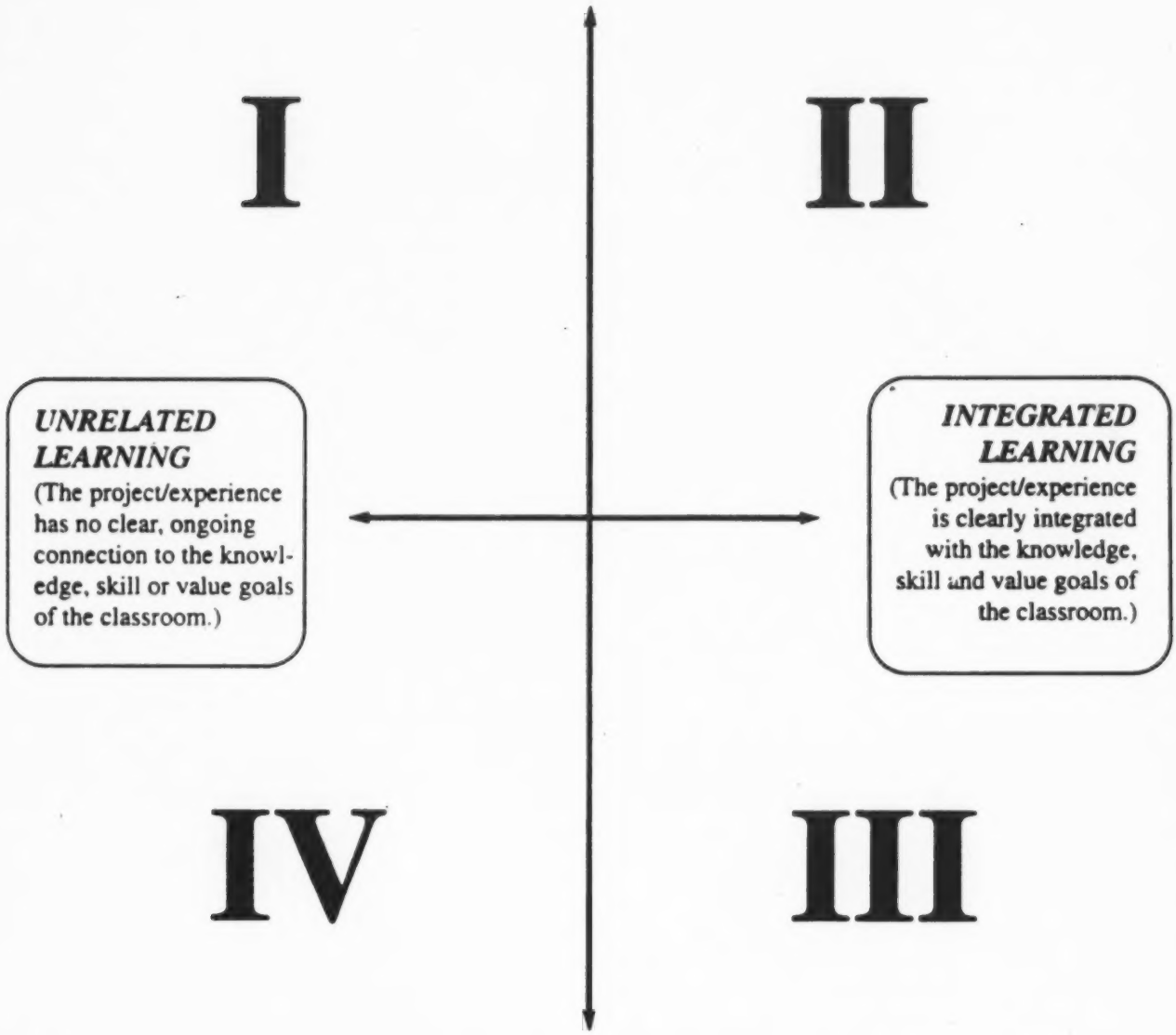
In the National and Community Service Act of 1989, service learning is defined as:

- a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community;
- is coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program and with the community;
- helps foster civic responsibility;
- is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled;
- and provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience.

As federal definitions go, we find this one to be fairly understandable and reasonable. However, the key to service learning is understanding the difference between community service and service learning and understanding some of the indicators of quality in different types of service learning.

Service Learning 2000 designed a tool to help people understand the difference between community service and service learning that also starts to get at indicators of high quality service learning that we find helpful. The tool, called a Quadrant, uses two intersecting lines to create four sections. (Please see diagram on next page.) At the Unrelated Learning point on the horizontal axis there is no connection between service and what is being taught in the classroom. At the Integrated Learning point on the horizontal axis, service is tightly woven into the goals of the class. At the Low Service point on the vertical axis, there is little or no service at all. At the High Service point of the vertical axis, the service is well organized and meets a very important community need. High quality service learning projects fit in Quadrant II in the top right corner of the box because they promote "high service" and are "highly integrated" into the curriculum. Traditional community service efforts fall into Quadrants One or Four.

HIGH SERVICE
(The project/experience meets a clear important need and is well organized.)


I
II
UNRELATED LEARNING
(The project/experience has no clear, ongoing connection to the knowledge, skill or value goals of the classroom.)
INTEGRATED LEARNING
(The project/experience is clearly integrated with the knowledge, skill and value goals of the classroom.)
IV
III

LOW SERVICE
(The project/experience is not geared toward important needs and/or is not well planned.)

Don Hill and Jill Addison, Service Learning 2000, 1993

According to Service Learning 2000 there are five elements to high quality service learning including high service, integrated learning, reflection, collaboration, and youth voice. The Quadrant is a tool to help practitioners measure their achievement in addressing the first two of these -- high service and integrated learning. The other three will be defined briefly. Reflection is the method by which students are helped to make meaning of their experiences. It can take any number of forms including journal writing, class discussions, oral presentations or graphic displays. In quality service learning reflection takes place before and after service and, when appropriate or necessary, during service projects. Collaboration with those who have the need is critical to successful service learning. Service learning efforts can not be designed without letting those with the needs help define both the problem and appropriate solutions. In much service learning people with needs are represented in collaborations by community-based agencies that specialize in that area. For instance, students planning a meal for the homeless may collaborate during planning with representatives from the community food closet not actual homeless people. The best collaborations involve all stakeholders in all facets of planning, implementation and evaluation. Finally, for service learning to be most effective youth must have a voice in planning. (Some practitioners view youth voice as a sub-set of collaboration.) Youth voice implies that students must be given some say in project design and implementation. However, it does not mean teachers give up all control over quality and planning. For example, in a geology unit, a teacher might focus on earthquakes and earthquake preparedness. She might challenge students to design ways to use their learning to help seniors living in the HUD project across from the school to be better prepared for earthquakes. She would let the students decide upon the nature of the project, but she has defined the parameters and clearly linked the effort to classroom learning.

What happened?

Music Collaborative

This project, in its second year, is a complicated extension of the popular cross-age tutoring efforts which exemplify a large percentage of most service learning efforts. Advanced band students from two middle schools, Jordan and Jane Lathrop Stanford (JLS), in the Palo Alto Unified School District are paired with fourth grade students from César Chávez Academy in the neighboring Ravenswood City School District. Once a week the students meet (rotating between all three schools) and the middle school students instruct the elementary students in basic instrumental music. Elementary school students are gathered, by themselves, two additional times each week to practice; while middle school students meet at their schools twice a month for the purpose of reflection and receiving instruction on "teaching methodology." Transportation is provided on a district bus, and students miss minimal class time to participate in this effort. Ravenswood City School District supplies the instruments for their students from an unused district supply; their entire music program was eliminated due to budget cuts in the late eighties.

The goal, by the end of the first year, was to have the students, both tutors and tutees, perform in a joint concert. However, the elementary students progressed so well that by May of the first year, they performed some numbers by themselves at the concerts held at each of the three schools. In the second year, many of the freshmen who participated the previous year continued to work with their fifth grade students, while a new group of middle school advanced band students have been assigned to work with the new group of fourth grade students.

The project is coordinated by the Music Coordinator for the Palo Alto Unified School District, a full-time certificated position responsible for supervision and scheduling of the fifteen shared music teachers that work at the eleven elementary and two middle schools in the district, and the staff developer for the César Chávez Academy, a full-time certificated staff member responsible for all special programs, supervising teachers, and helping with administration at this 672 student K-8 school.

Jordan Seventh Grade

Both Jordan and JLS offer all their seventh grade students some exposure to service learning, but they take two very different approaches.

At Jordan, all 320 seventh grade students are assigned to one of four teams. Each team is made up of between two and three teachers from the core academic subjects including math, science, social studies, and language arts. Beginning in December and continuing through the spring each team participates in a service experience once a week for four weeks for approximately two hours. The placements are arranged by Youth Community Service, and prior to their first week students choose the type of assignment they would like from a list a categories provided to them. Students are driven to the placements by volunteer parents and are supervised on-site by personnel from the community-based agencies. Agency placements range from infant day care centers to elementary classrooms to convalescent homes to soup kitchens. While the students are off-campus their teachers meet in teams to coordinate planning. Each teacher is responsible for both preparing the students for their placements and coordinating reflection sessions upon their return. The service work supports two of the themes emphasized in seventh grade: "Growing Up" and "Difference."

This effort is in its third year and although modifications have been made over the years, the essence of the structure has remained the same. Many of the same teachers and community-based placements have been involved for all three years.

Jane Lathrop Stanford Seventh Grade

While all seventh grade students at JLS are also in teams, their service experience used the concept of team in a different way and it has also evolved over the two years it has been offered. In the first year, students on one team all took part in a intensive exposure to service as part of a two-day mini-unit the week of

Thanksgiving as part of their historical study of the Renaissance. (A Renaissance person excels in three areas: having many varied experiences, developing a variety of skills and talents, and maintaining a commitment to public service.) Prior to the first day students selected an area of interest to them and on Tuesday they went in, small groups, to work at community-based agencies working in those areas. Parents, teachers, administrators, aides, counselors, and other adults all helped to supervise groups so the adult to student ratio was quite low. On Tuesday afternoon the students participated in a jigsaw reflection session where they shared with other students what they had done and learned. Finally, Wednesday morning all 150 students worked together to plant trees in the Stanford Foothills and then participated in a celebration in the Foothills prior to an early pre-Thanksgiving dismissal. Preparation for the service experience took place in both science and social studies classes. [*Insert curriculum connections here.]

The effort was well-received and duplicated, with some modifications, by the other team the next spring. Again all students worked in small groups on a service project and participated in jigsaw style reflection sessions. In addition, all students viewed a production about life as a homeless person by the Theater of the Homeless group -- this group of homeless actors includes two middle school age children whose father is homeless.

Over the summer one of the seventh grade teachers attended the Service Learning 2000 Summer Institute and further developed the service learning plan for these students. In the second year, all seventh grade students participated in a three day service learning intersession in the spring. The entire theme of the year was becoming a Renaissance person, and this intersession asked students to become Renaissance people themselves by taking ownership of an issue of importance to them. Again, non-teaching adults were pulled in to help facilitate groups, and the groups included between ten and twenty students. The intersession units were prepared by the adult sponsor with some help from a core planning group. (The planning group did develop some units for teachers who said they would be glad to sponsor a group, but did not have time or expertise to plan a unit.) Each unit had to encompass six factors, but teachers could use the entire time of the intersession as they chose. The factors were: an issue, an agency, curricular connections, service, a product, and reflection. All teachers did schedule their unit so their students could participate in a reflection/sharing assembly on the final afternoon.

Jordan Sixth Grade

The Jordan sixth grade project was the one referred to briefly in the scenario at the start of this paper. On one of two Fridays in November all sixth grade students spent a day doing community service at one of twenty community placements. They were given some choice in their placement and some preparatory work was done in their core classes by way of talking about community service, volunteering and non-profit organizations. Students were escorted to their placements by adult and parent volunteers and supervised on-site by these adults and the staff at the community-based organizations. Upon their return to campus, all students

completed a written reflection and, with their peers from that site, performed a skit for the other groups.

This project was started before there was a formal emphasis on service learning and is probably closer to community service than service learning, however it does serve as introduction to the seventh grade service learning project and does embrace some of the principles of high quality service learning.

Jane Lathrop Stanford Sixth Grade

For two days in the fall sixth grade teachers are released for parent conferences. The options for students are to be covered by substitute teachers, be released from school for a staff development day, or to be at school under the supervision of someone other than their classroom teacher.

JLS has a number of students with special needs, including Special Day Classes for acoustically handicapped, learning handicapped, orthopedically handicapped, and visually handicapped students. Since JLS students will spend three years on a campus interacting with these students, it had long been a goal to provided some sort of disability awareness program. In addition to the programs at the school, there are several programs for people with disabilities on the adjoining elementary school campus and on other sites within walking distance from the school.

On the two days in the fall, each sixth grade classroom was divided into two groups of students. Substitute teachers and community volunteers were used as leaders for each group. Four stations were set up to give information about students with each of the handicapping conditions served by the school. The emphasis of each station was to share what it would we like to be a student with that handicapping condition and how every student can help each of those students. Students also heard a panel of recent JLS graduates talk about how it felt to attend JLS as a student with a handicapping condition. During the two days there were also presentations on topics relevant to the health framework. Time was provided for written reflection and group discussion.

Later in the year each sixth grade class was matched with either a Special Education classroom on site or at a nearby elementary school, or with an agency within walking distance serving people with disabilities. The teachers and providers worked together to determine how the students could provide service to those with handicaps: possibilities included tutoring and assisting with parties or outings.

Seventh Grade World History Africa Project

Students studying world history in seventh grade social studies heard a guest speaker, a Ugandan woman, talk about life and school in Uganda. In her conversations with students it arose that education is not free in Uganda and that there is a shortage of supplies for students who do get to go to school. This woman,

a member of the Y.W.C.A. in Uganda, was working hard to bring education to more people, especially girls. The idea developed to sponsor a book drive and send the books to the Y.W.C.A. in Kampala, Uganda, the capital city and a central place.

Students studied the history and geography of Uganda, studied the modern day issues facing the country, and developed pen-pal relationships with students their age at a school in Kampala. Books were collected from families, friends, and neighbors. Students then sorted the books into types and evaluated each book on its condition, appropriateness and up-to-dateness. Finally the books were shipped to Uganda. The pen-pals continue to write each other.

Community Service Class

This elective course is open to seventh and eighth grade students at Jane Lathrop Stanford Middle School. It is in its third semester and usually enrolls approximately twenty students. Students spend the first two weeks of the class learning about community service, visiting possible placements and hearing from representatives of community-based organizations about their agencies and their work. Students then select a place they would like to volunteer and, starting in week three, work at that site four times a week during the class period. On the fifth day, students come to class for reflection and debriefing activities. Currently all the students are working with younger children either at elementary schools, pre-schools or day care centers, so some of the classroom activities have been related to working with young children and child development.

The class is offered seventh period so students can go home directly from their placements, but the school operates on a rotating schedule so seventh period is not always the final period of the day.

Although this course bears the name "community service" it is considered service learning in the broadest sense of the word in that it includes reflection and the goals of the course (although not strictly academic) are met primarily by direct service to the community.

Who benefited?

In our analysis six groups have benefited as a result of these service learning efforts. The include: the students, the beneficiaries of the service, the school as an institution, the community-at-large, the teachers, and the administrators. These impacts are described below. In each category, beyond offering the broad generalizations, we will share one or two concrete examples from the case studies above to illustrate our assumptions.

The Students

One of the reasons to engage in service learning as opposed to community service is that there is an explicit assumption that through service learning the student who serves will be impacted, whereas in community service the intention of the service and the expectation of impact only considers those who are served.

In our experience, this assumption has been proved true in most instances. Many students who have engaged in service learning projects have been successful, some for the first time, in a project that "counts" at school. Service learning has allowed students to flourish who do not always shine in the traditional classroom setting. Similarly, many community-based agencies come to depend upon student volunteers, and, for some students, this is the first time they have ever felt needed by anyone. Of course service does not have this great an impact on all students, however almost all do

- learn about the community in which they live. Most have never been to the agency at which they volunteer, and some were not knowledgeable about the issue that agency works to address.
- learn about service and come to realize the role volunteer service plays in a community. Prior to their service experiences, many students were completely unaware of the social service sector of the community.
- learn about some of the skills it will take to hold a job. Service work is very different from school and being aware of the importance of things like dress, punctuality, and attitude is a new experience for some students.

Gerrald was a popular seventh grade student leader, but he tended to use his leadership abilities in negative ways. Generally he was not doing well in his academic subjects. He was assigned to a child care center for his placement, and his teachers were very curious about how he would react to the situation. He got rave reviews from the agency for this patience in helping young children learn their letters. He even asked if he could continue after his assignment ended. This year Gerrald is a school-service aide and has become a very respectful and respected leader on campus. When he heard the seventh grade Renaissance project was going to be repeated again this year he asked if he could help organize it. As evidence that he was qualified to help, he shared with the lead teacher his first semester report card which included an "A" in social studies.

Andrew was a new eighth-grader at the school in the first semester Community Service class. He chose to work at a child care center located near his home. He became so valued there that both he and the agency requested that he continue for the remainder of the year. Andrew found an important niche for himself providing service in his new community.

We as educators think there is another benefit of service learning for students. When students serve at community-based agencies, we think it is good for them not to be the center of attention and concern. For middle level students especially, many of whom believe the world centers around their needs, it is healthy for them to interact with an institution that does not exist solely for their well-being. And it is amazing to see how many students act differently at these sites than they do at school. They seem to know, intuitively, that the main purpose of the agency is not for them and that they have a different role here than at school.

Jimmy was a major discipline problem at school and was assigned to a pre-school to work with younger children. He assumed a completely different persona at that school and acted as a reasonable teacher the whole time he was there: he took charge of his students in a positive way and was rewarded for it. His picture appeared in the newspaper, and the agency honored him with a special acknowledgment.

The Beneficiaries of the Service

One of the principles of good practice of service learning is that the service meets a real need in the community. Thus service learning would be a disappointing failure if we did not have any evidence that those who were served benefited from the service. Luckily we do.

Several of the community-based agencies where students have served commented on their ability to provide more individual attention to clients, be they children in day care or the elderly in convalescent hospitals, when student volunteers come to help. Student volunteers provided the extra pair of hands that made certain activities much more feasible.

Residents at the Nursing Inn of Menlo Park, anxiously await Tuesday mornings because Tuesday is "outing day." At 10:00 A.M. seventh grade students arrive from Jordan and escort their wheelchair bound buddies on excursions to locations in close proximity to the Nursing Inn. Students and their buddies have gone to the park and to the local donut shop. The activities director at the Nursing Inn says she could not do the outings without the seventh grade students: she simply does not have enough staff to escort all the residents who want to go.

In projects like the Music Collaborative, the students are not supplementing an existing service or making an agency more effective, they are providing the only service of its type in the community. Without the music tutors there would be no music program at César Chávez Academy. This service is valued highly by both the music students and their families. Similarly, one of the most important realizations of students collecting books for Uganda was that they were the only source of books for this library. They took their task of creating a balanced and complete offering very seriously.

One Chávez parent wrote: "I believe my child learned that music is not just something that we hear on the radio. I feel very happy he got a chance to do something that a lot of us take for granted. I always wanted to learn how to play the piano. Instead, I dropped out of school. So now that my child has the chance to try something new and challenging, I want him to take every opportunity he can. P.S. Just maybe one day he will teach ME how to play the piano."

Finally, sometimes the benefit of the service is indirect. In the sixth grade disability awareness effort at JLS, the service projects are the direct service that will

result from this effort; but the knowledge students gain about disabilities has a positive impact beyond the service provided by the service projects.

School staff have noticed a subtle shift in the attitudes of the sixth grade students after their experiences learning about handicapping conditions. They seem less likely to "put down" or make fun of students with disabilities, more empathic, and more interested in supporting these classmates.

The School

Service learning has some broad impacts on the school as an institution in the community too. Through service adults in the community have the opportunity to see young people in positive interactions and this helps to counter the negative stereotypes of youth so prevalent in our society.

Marge Carnoy, the Director of a senior housing project located across the street from JLS is a powerful and well-known figure in the Palo Alto community and a very dominant voice for the senior community. Prior to service learning most of her contacts with JLS were in the form of complaints to the administration. Students cut through her facility on the way to and from school and she attributed some vandalism of property to these students. After working with students from the community service class and seventh grade projects over the period of a year her public attitude toward middle school students is completely different. She talks convincingly about how important students are to her Center and speaks to groups around the city about the power of service. Most revealing, recently when she called an administrator at JLS to report that students had carved their initials in some wet concrete outside her Center she said, "I know they are just being kids." This observation reflects a major transformation in her understanding of adolescents.

A different effect has been that service learning has allowed the community at large a glance at what schools do. It has demonstrated to adults in the community how diverse and complex students are today and exposed, in a new light, some of the challenges of educating all students today.

Several adults who helped supervise the sixth grade service days at Jordan commented on how difficult it must be to be a teacher. They were exhausted at the end of one day with a group of ten to fifteen students. One women even went so far as to say, "now I really think teachers earn their salaries." Unfortunately, one pregnant woman also decided she absolutely did not want a boy if he would ever be like these students!

The Community At-Large

As we touched upon when talking about the indirect benefits of the disability awareness project, there are some important implications for the community when students take part in service learning. Service learning engages students in experiences that cause them to question assumptions they hold and, hopefully, helps to break down inaccurate stereotypes.

In a reflection session following service a student commented that he did not think it was good for children to be put into day care. An engaged conversation followed while students debated the pros and cons of child care and talked about the reasons parents use child care. As the conversation evolved, students seemed to gain a new understanding about how expensive it is to live in Palo Alto, the importance of wages, and the need, in some cases, for two salaries.

Until recently, Palo Alto and East Palo Alto, although neighboring cities, have had no meaningful interactions. The vision of East Palo Alto held by many Palo Altans is of a crime-ridden, dirty ghetto. Through service learning projects that take Palo Alto students into East Palo Alto to work with other students or young children, students have been able to see the falseness of these impressions. In one journal entry, following a visit to East Palo Alto, a student wrote: "Before this expedition I had only heard the bad horrible things about East Palo Alto. It wasn't that bad at all. The next time I hear about something bad that happened in East Palo Alto, I'll try to remember all the good things." Another commented: "I realize the rumors I have heard are a big bunch of hogwash. The kids were just as friendly, sweet, and innocent as the kids I know. I'm glad I went on that trip because it was a wonderful experience to meet new people and find out about their life." (Although its sad that they started with the opinions they did, it does serve both communities to have these negative ideas shattered.)

The Teacher

One of the most important benefits of service learning for many teachers is that it allows them to see their students succeed. Although we listed this benefit under the "students" category, for many teachers it is reason enough to engage in service learning. Most good teachers truly believe that each student has something to contribute, but in normal day-to-day interactions with some students they see very little evidence of this. The chance to see their students in a different setting is very important.

A number of teachers we work with seem to be engaged in service learning because it allows them to connect their passion with their work. By bringing something they care deeply about into their work lives, they are able to make work more meaningful and their lives more coherent.

The teacher whose students collected books for the African library is very committed to racial justice and the empowerment of all people. She has traveled to Africa and spends much of her personal time working on community projects related to these issues. The opportunity to link the work of her seventh grade history students to her summer travels and her personal life added to a sense of coherence in her own life. It also allowed her a chance to share something meaningful to her with her students creating, a more personal bond than might have occurred otherwise.

Finally, just as service learning allows some students to "shine" who do not do so normally, it also highlights the talents and energies of teachers who are not otherwise recognized.

Special education teachers who are not always considered equals by their colleagues were fundamental to the success of the disability awareness project at JLS. They planned several of the activities and presented key information. Thus not only did students learn about disabilities, but teachers learned of some of the special talents held by these teachers. Most important, these gifted teachers were given a chance to appear in the spotlight.

The Administrators

Many people consider administrative buy-in and support key to the success of service learning. Thus the benefits for an administrator must be as important as those for any other party. Although the administrator pool we studied for this paper was small, it seemed there were two main benefits to supporting service learning. First, many times service learning allowed administrators a mechanism to accomplish something they thought was important. Many administrators look for ways to link their schools to the surrounding community, to engage students in experiences that will promote relevant learning or enhance job skills. These are important educational outcomes that are not met effectively through the traditional classroom structure.

In Palo Alto Unified administrators and staff are supposed to make sure students demonstrated twenty-four outcomes before graduation. Thirteen of these outcomes are academic and intellectual competencies and can be worked toward, with some ease, in the curriculum; however eleven are personal qualities, and demonstrating achievement of them is much more complex. (See Appendix A for a copy of the district outcomes.) For instance, one of the personal qualities is "demonstrates social and environmental responsibility." Although it is possible to observe a student's behavior at school and make some determination about competency in this area, it is far easier to observe in a service learning setting. In fact, students could be asked, as part of a reflection session, to comment on their sense of social responsibility both before and after serving.

Service learning gives administrators some flexibility to achieve goals to which they are committed. Both the sixth grade projects and the seventh grade project at Jordan helped the administration to support the wishes of teachers.

At Jordan, the seventh grade teams wanted joint planning time and scheduling such was difficult and cost-prohibitive. Using adult volunteers as supervisors for the service projects allowed teacher teams two hours of planning time when their students were in the community. The only expectation was that teachers must work to integrate the students' community experiences into the classroom curriculum.

The two sixth grade projects were both designed in part to accommodate the desire of sixth grade teachers to have time for parent conferences. (Sixth grade has recently been added to middle school, and parent conferences are an important facet of elementary school to which many sixth grade teachers are committed.) Letting sixth grade students out of school for parent conferences is difficult so the service learning projects have served as a way to provide a meaningful and important experience to students and still provide time for parent conferences.

At what costs?

The benefits to all the parties not withstanding, there are some real concerns associated with service learning. Some of them are universal to all types of projects and some are more specific to the nature of the effort.

The difficulty of finding meaningful service work.

Many of these projects are predicated upon the assumption that students will be engaged in work at community-based organizations. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find places where students can help in a meaningful way. Certainly there are some placements where students feel needed, where the work is age-appropriate, where the agency benefits from student assistance, and where the students learn skills or behaviors that are linked to the schools' goals. However, these are few and far between. There are a number of agencies that meet some, but not all of these criteria. Frequently, the work will be very important to an agency, but not engaging for students i.e. clerical work.

A different challenge with agencies arises with respect to convalescent hospitals. There are a number of large, skilled nursing facilities that are open to student visits. However, many middle school students are scared by these institutions. Students volunteering at these sites need intensive preparation and a lot of help thinking about appropriate topics of conversation. Many teachers have not felt competent to prepare students for these visits and the agencies are too understaffed to release a person to come to the school to do the preparation.

There is also a challenge of finding enough placements, of any value at all, when service learning projects are designed for large groups. For example, during the Jordan sixth grade service awareness days we really had to scramble to place all students and were only able to do so when all music students were sent on a tour of senior centers to perform.

The difficulty of planning and coordination.

A second challenge of all the service learning efforts is that they take incredible amounts of time to operationalize. Time is needed to conceptualize the effort, to develop connections with community partners, to coordinate the logistics, and to develop lessons that would establish a learning environment for these projects. Across the board time is in short supply, and finding enough to develop a meaningful, well-executed service learning effort has been close to impossible. It does get easier over time, but this is related to the third challenge.

Of all the things a staff must to do get ready for a service learning project, the most important, academically, is creating an academic rationale for the service learning -- that is linking the service to classroom learning. However, given the work involved in developing these projects, oftentimes the first time, it is all one can do to make sure all the students have something to do and get back to campus safely. After that some work can be undertaken to develop meaningful placements and to remove sites that were not engaging for the students or where students were not helpful to the agencies. Finally, the teacher can really focus on the curricular connections. However, in this schema, it could be the third time a project is undertaken before the curricular connections get any quality attention, in a project that happened only once a year, this is a three year delay.

The problem of energy.

Another challenge is that planning and executing a meaningful service learning experience for middle school age students can be exhausting. There is a lot of work to be done, and much of it is done in coordination with people who do not normally deal with kids. Those planning service learning must believe in its power and its importance beforehand; otherwise there is a good chance they might burn out on the planning and not stick with it long enough to develop a quality experience.

The problem of not feeling successful.

Finally, in our experience we have encountered some frustration among staff because service learning is hard, but reflection -- the key element in helping students to process their experiences and create meaning is close to impossible. No matter what the context, students at this age are not skilled at reflective thinking and even the best educators with the smallest groups have a hard time crafting exercises that will help students to process their experiences in a reflective way. Thus, educators feel frustrated with the process because they are not feeling successful as educators.

Other problems and difficulties to consider.

Specific projects also have specific costs. For instance, the community service class is open only to twenty students at a time, and since the school average is twenty-nine, someone else has a bigger class to balance that one. Even with block/team scheduling when large groups of students leave campus for any period of time it is disruptive to the schedule at the school: students miss other classes or the bell schedule must be modified. No matter how well designed the service learning effort is, and regardless of its importance to the students and the community, there is a sense that service learning causes instructional time to be lost.

Why is service learning a difficult reform to implement?

Any reform brings with it both costs and benefits, and in the final analysis of both vis-á-vis service learning, many people have still committed to implementing

it. What have we learned from the experiences in Palo Alto Unified that can shape understanding of why this is a difficult reform to implement?

Service learning requires a high level of buy-in.

Some school change efforts can be undertaken by single teachers, teams, or departments without the support of an administrator and without coordinating with others. Most service learning can not. Some projects, like the book-drive, are not disruptive to other classes and can be undertaken without broad-based support, but others need the commitment of many to succeed. The most effective curriculum connections are interdisciplinary in nature, so ideally you need teachers from all departments. The success of the project depends, oftentimes, of the ability of students to leave school for longer than one period, so service learning requires the support of those that control the bell schedule. It requires transportation which carries with it both financial and legal costs that must be assumed by someone. Finally, service learning works best when people are sharing from their strengths. Thus, the success in Palo Alto has been in no small part due to the commitment of parents, the volunteer coordinator, and the school secretaries and counselors.

Service learning requires leaving school.

This may be the biggest stumbling block for service learning. Generally, it is very hard for school people to leave school. The world beyond the school yard can be uncomfortable and is often unknown. When you leave school, you leave a situation where you have a great deal of control and go into one where you have little to no control. This can be very scary.

Service learning is dependent upon strong relations with the local community, and many teachers (and some students) are not familiar with the local community where the school is located. Many teachers commute and some students are bussed, so knowledge of community-based agencies within close proximity to the school can be limited.

Service learning requires a low student to adult ratio.

Most of the projects described here needed groups of students smaller than the average class size, so adults from around the school and community were tapped to help, including parents, counselors, librarians, college students, agency personnel and district office staff. Generally these people were very willing to help and supportive of the goals of the project, but they were not experienced at working with groups of middle school students. They just did not have the same skills most classroom teachers do.

Service learning requires a lot of planning and preparation time.

If service learning is going to evolve from real community needs, then significant time must be dedicated to preparing students to meet those needs and connecting the lessons students learn while meeting those needs to content areas or school goals. For instance, for students to be successful at nursing homes, they need empathy skills. Developing empathy skills is a legitimate learning outcome in

middle school, but it is not a lesson most content area teachers have already prepared. So we are stuck with two issues: how will we find time to prepare the lesson, and which teacher will give up another lesson to make room for this one?

In many cases, a weak lesson is developed and condensed into too short a period of time and basically, the student leaves for the nursing home underprepared.

Recommendations for Other Practitioners:

Service learning in California has had both "top down" and "bottom up" motivations. Our experiences with service learning and with the reflection that we undertook to prepare this paper lead us to offer three recommendations for other practitioners who usually represent the "bottom up" energy of this movement.

Allow enough time.

In essence, do not expect a project to be great -- well-developed and tightly integrated into the curriculum, the first time you do it. It takes time, but it is worth the time. One of the authors uses a three-cycle schema to outline the evolution of service learning efforts. The first time out the project is dominated by the logistic-type questions:

- Where will the students go?
- How will they get there?
- Who will supervise?
- What about insurance?
- What about free-lunch students who will not be on campus at lunch-time?
- How will student assignments be made?
- Will students miss any classes? What will this do to the school schedule?

The overriding concern at this stage is to get all the students out and back safely; quality of placements and curricular ties are secondary in the thinking at this time.

During the second cycle, logistics only take fine-tuning assuming no major incidents occurred in the first cycle; the energy can be focused on the quality of the service. In this stage, coordination focuses on making sure the students not only have a safe service learning experience, but also have a meaningful one.

- Placements that forgot the students were coming or who had no service work to do are removed from the list.
- Time is spent talking with agencies about giving students an orientation to the work they will be doing and about the developmental abilities of this age student.
- Agencies who enjoyed the students and where students felt welcome and well-utilized are asked to recommend other possible placement agencies.
- Agencies that were unsure about participating and did not in the first round are revisited. They are informed about how things went the first

time, given some other community-based agencies to call to reference, and once again asked to participate.

This stage involves much more talking with people off-campus and not-associated with schools. It is difficult stage because communicating with the outside world, is very hard for most teachers: they are not near phones most of the day, they can not leave campus easily during the school day and they do not have voice mail.

Finally, the third time through a service learning effort, the primary concern can be: how does this experience relate to what we are teaching? Some attention still needs to be paid to logistics and the quality of the service, but most of the time can be devoted to the quality of the learning.

We both believe, fervently, in the power of service to change students' lives so this lesson about the life cycle of service learning is a plea to evaluators and policy-makers not to judge service learning as a teaching strategy too quickly. It takes time, and it is worth the wait.

Collaborate and listen to agencies.

Service learning works best when the service is meaningful and age-appropriate. In our experience, this type of service happens most often under the guidance of well-intended and informed community-based agencies. Developing strong connections to community-based agencies is a long and time-intensive process. First one most identify possible agencies, then one should meet with them to discuss the goals and purposes of service learning and listen to their questions and concerns. Throughout the time students work with that agency, school personnel need to be on call to deal with unexpected situations. When there seems to be a conflict between the school's goals and the agency's mission the school personnel must be committed to working it out.

Considering all of this, there is a temptation to say, "let's just do service right here at school. We'll do something for the other grades or classes." Although there may be very significant needs right on campus and although there are some outstanding models of meaningful peer-to-peer service, this approach does not provide the best experience for students. When students work off campus at community-based agencies they get to interact with adults who are not their teachers or parents, they get to learn from experts in a given field, very frequently they get to meet or see the beneficiaries of their service, and they come to learn about and understand the community beyond the school yard. They also get the opportunity to be judged by and interact with people not familiar with middle schools. (For students like Jimmy and Gerrald they get a clean slate to try again.)

The time and effort needed to develop strong on-going relationships with community-based agencies willing to work with young students is a very good investment in the success and long-term viability of service learning.

Do not let the logistics push the learning out of the picture.

Despite whatever truth there might be to the three cycle schema presented above, it is still very important that service learning practitioners remember that learning is at the heart of successful service learning. Service learning must always be undertaken with the hope of facilitating a learning and useful experience for both the student and the service recipient.

One recommendation we have is to continue to provide professional development experiences for service learning teachers that emphasize learning and curriculum integration. Workshops on reflection techniques, curriculum design, or time for team planning will all help to highlight the learning angle of service learning.

Implications for Policy Makers

These recommendations will not be easy to carry-out without policy decisions that support them, so we also offer three observations for educational reformers, the "top down" portion of the equation. While neither the recommendations nor the implications are all-inclusive they reflect the issues that emerged to us as significant at this time.

Service learning usually succeeds only when it is driven by someone very committed to it.

Service learning is not an easy reform to implement. Even without thinking of it as a reform, it is not an easy teaching strategy to implement. Those who embrace service learning locally and nationally do so for many reasons. We must find room in the movement for people with all types of rationales and beliefs. We must also nurture those who embrace service learning. The service learning leaders at schools -- passionate teachers, committed administrators, and caring parents -- must be supported and acknowledged. Support can come in the form of recognition, release time for planning, clerical support, or professional development.

Service learning will not continue without support.

Much of the service learning that is happening in California is made possible by funding provided by the Corporation for National Service under the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. These funds have enabled schools and districts across the state to establish quality programs that engage students of all ages in service learning. A key question in the grant application process has to do with '"sustainability" or "institutionalization," and regardless of what people say on their proposals we do not believe this reform will continue without financial support. In our observation funds are necessary for four things:

- transportation,
- professional development,
- reducing the teacher student ratio, and;
- coordination.

All of these costs can range from insignificant to outrageous. Potentially students could walk or bike to service work close to their school or home, but not always. Coordination can sometimes be undertaken by volunteers or other program directors, like the student activities director, but this is not always appropriate. Likewise, we have had great luck in using parent volunteers and volunteers from the community to lower group size in service learning, but not all communities have this luxury, and it is not always appropriate.

Funds to support this activity do not necessarily have to come in the form of outside grants, but they do need to be identified from somewhere, and many school districts do not have any excess funds in their general operating budgets. Money is also not a reason not to engage in service learning. All good teaching takes financial support. This methodology is not unique. We must find the money to support good teaching if we want students to leave schools prepared to succeed in the larger community.

<u>It will be a long time before service learning impacts systemically. Continue to work for large-scale impact, but be satisfied with smaller scale change.</u>

We have not seen any instances where service learning did not benefit students in some important ways, and based on this observation, we do think service learning potentially has power for all students. However, this does not mean service learning should only be judged to be effective and worthwhile when it engages all students in a school or when service learning is used all year long. Service learning brings benefits to both students and the communities in even small incarnations. We need to celebrate all service learning, push hard for quality service learning, and appreciate that service learning for all students may never happen.

Further Study

Many of the benefits we found as a result of service learning in our case studies may be specific to the suburban nature of the Palo Alto community. It would interesting and worthwhile to look at service learning in urban and rural settings to see if the benefits and challenges are similar.

The three-cycle schema that is outlined in the recommendations section of this paper needs to be tested beyond the case studies presented here. There needs to be some study to see if these three stages are common to most service learning efforts.

Finally, the data for this paper was drawn exclusively from middle schools so some investigation needs to take place to determine if the costs, benefits, recommendations, and implications are the same when elementary and high school service is studied.

Conclusion

Service learning is a powerful teaching strategy that can help all students to succeed and provide important work that benefits the community. The benefits of this strategy are broad and far ranging, but there are significant concerns associated with quality service learning, especially in its start-up phases. In our experience, the benefits make dealing with the concerns worthwhile. We would encourage teachers, administrators, representatives of community-based organizations, and educational policy makers to seriously consider the potential of service learning as an important teaching strategy and to work to make service learning a part of all students' educational experience.

PALO ALTO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
STUDENT OUTCOMES

INTRODUCTION

We want our young people, upon graduation from the Palo Alto Unified School District, to be

prepared for meaningful participation in an interdependent global community.

To do so, students must develop the knowledge, skills, and values to be

lifelong learners, responsible citizens, employable, productive workers

OUTCOMES

As a result of their experience in the Palo Alto schools, students will be able to demonstrate, each to the best of his or her ability, the following:

ACADEMIC AND INTELLECTUAL COMPETENCIES

- Communicates effectively through listening, speaking, and writing
- Reads with understanding
- Demonstrates knowledge of key concepts, principles, processes, facts, and skills in each discipline
  - These disciplines include language arts, history–social science, mathematics, science, physical education, visual and performing arts, foreign language, applied academics, health, and practical living skills.
- Demonstrates ability to integrate knowledge
- Thinks creatively
- Thinks critically
- Utilizes technologies efficiently and creatively
- Uses research skills effectively
- Works effectively in groups
- Learns independently
- Uses effective decision-making processes
- Solves problems effectively
- Demonstrates ability to self-reflect and self-evaluate

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Demonstrates effective interpersonal skills
- Exhibits concern and respect for others
- Appreciates the strengths and contributions of diverse cultures, groups, and individuals to our society and world
- Demonstrates social and environmental responsibility
- Demonstrates aesthetic awareness and appreciation
- Demonstrates emotional fitness
- Demonstrates a healthy lifestyle
- Exhibits personal integrity
- Exhibits positive self-esteem
- Exhibits an understanding that there are core values and beliefs which unify our community and our nation
- Exhibits a belief that learning is a joyful and rewarding life-long activity

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